PRE-COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY: ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

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CORA DROZD

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ABSTRACT

Pre-College Philosophy: Its Implications for American Democracy in the 21st Century

Cora Drozd
Department of Philosophy
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Claire Katz
Department of Philosophy
Texas A&M University

Education has played a primary role in the development of democracy, beginning with its inception in Ancient Greece. It would be a mistake to examine the modern relationship between education and democracy without using Plato's philosophy as a vantage point. Plato's *Republic* was the first work of political philosophy, which along with Plato's other dialogues, provides an important historical link between modern and ancient political life. By reading Plato, we have insight into Athenian democracy, which we may contextualize against our own democracy, from inception until now. What we learn is that the challenges posed by democracy in ancient Greece are not distinct from the challenges we face today.

Socrates' attempt to cultivate philosophy in Athens was a futile one. His public questioning of Athens' most prominent men was taken, rather, as a kind of public shaming. He was sentenced to death, sealed his fate, and drank the hemlock, as Plato recounts in the *Apology of Socrates*. Through Socrates, Plato offers compelling evidence that a democracy ill-disposed towards philosophy is no more democratic than a mob—how loudly these concerns echo in 21st century American democracy. The division caused by protests and the eristic debate culture on social media demand resolution in the form of civil discourse; yet there is little advancement

towards a practical solution beyond the sharing of platitudes suggesting we “coexist.” To effectively coexist, we must engage the diverse thought that underscores our democratic society, which is precisely where philosophy finds its place in K-12 education.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Gramps, who instilled in me a spirit for education, and to the memory of Dr. Scott Austin, who set me forth on my path to philosophy.

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KEY WORDS

C	Children
C	Citizens
D	Democracy
E	Education
I	Internet
J	Jefferson
P	Philosophy
PL	Plato
PCP	Pre-college philosophy
R	Republic
S	Socrates
SM	Social media

INTRODUCTION

Socrates' sacrifice to philosophy over two thousand years ago is mired in the truth that philosophy, namely, the questioning and self-examination in which it consists, has been unwelcome since democracy's inception. Even in modern democratic society, the view that questioning is dangerous persists. This should be troubling, as American democracy emerged precisely because individuals challenged the conventions of their time. Thomas Jefferson and his contemporaries were products of the Enlightenment, who saw self-rule as the popular means of liberation from oppression under tyrannical monarchs. They envisioned a society in which people could dissent from the government and from one other; their challenge was to formulate the precise institutions and principles for this aim. Their product was the United States Constitution, a work of philosophy crafted in the same manner as Plato's *Republic.* But whereas Plato's *Republic* was meant only as an ideal, the United States Constitution was both an ideal and a practical framework for government. My proposal is that we, as participants in American democracy, collectively examine where we have deviated from this ideal, and work towards its restoration. To start, we should examine how philosophy has been relegated to a position that is no longer central to American ethos. From there, we should turn to the public education system to examine how philosophy can be reincorporated into our everyday lives.

On a national debate stage in 2015, Marco Rubio famously declared "we need more welders and [fewer] philosophers," which points to a misconception of philosophy as a purposeless discipline. But when we place philosophy against the backdrop of American democracy, we learn that philosophy is an inherently *democratic* discipline. Both democracy and philosophy aim for a common object: truth. This might seem an abstract interpretation of

democracy, but it is precisely what Thomas Jefferson had in mind as one of the designers of American democracy. In his Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, Jefferson writes, "truth is great and will prevail if left to herself…her natural weapons…free argument and debate." Jefferson means to elevate the value that *truth is not under the jurisdiction of government.* It is from this value that democracy's principles, including separation of church and state, freedom of speech, and even the concept of self-rule, are derived. Without these protections, the government may impose its own ideology under the guise of truth. The only way to ascertain the truth is to place it at the hands of free argument and debate.

This would be the ideal image of democracy: a truth-seeking people who ponder the truth through collaborative discourse. But in a democracy common-interest is typically sacrificed at the expense of self-interest, which is not what Jefferson envisioned. At the same time that Jefferson envisaged a democracy, which granted power to individuals, he captured the ideas of a republic, the "matters of public concern," under which people can participate and be educated in common. What is it that we have in common and how do we operate such that we are linked to one another? Jefferson's democracy was not to create a rigid individualism. It was to suggest that there was no better way to secure the public good than by placing it at the hands of the public, instead of the government.

SECTION I

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

Socrates' contribution to philosophy was not made through an abstract theory; but rather, it was his noting something distinctive about the human tendency: humans are averse to questioning that which they think they know. Taking this complex into account, Socrates propagated a model through which a person becomes, perhaps reluctantly, immersed in a search for knowledge. This method, known as *dialectic*, is an epistemological model that aims to move from belief to knowledge through rational discussion. Contrast it to the *eristic* model, a method of debate that aims at tearing down one's opponent, rather than forming a community of inquiry, as the dialectic attempts to do. Whereas eristic debate is intended to be destructive, the dialectic is meant to be constructive.

But the dialectic model is embroiled in a paradox: for it to be constructive, it is at least partially, destructive. For the interlocutors to be willed to move beyond the realm of belief, they must be exposed to the limits of their knowledge. This process, known as the *elenchus,* requires them to place their beliefs under close scrutiny, but it does not guarantee that they will arrive at the truth. In Plato's dialogues, this method involves Socrates, in a rather clever manner, refuting his interlocutor's beliefs by catching them in a contradiction. At a minimum, this cross-examination is provocative, usually resulting in a disgruntled interlocutor, as instantiated by Thrasymachus in the *Republic,* Gorgias, and Meno.

Socrates' method of questioning emerged as the preeminent method of doing philosophy. Its significance is that it demonstrates a meta-philosophical point: the result is less important than the inquiry itself. Philosophy is paradoxical because it is disliked for this same reason that it is

valuable: being uncertain in what one knows. Philosophy requires its participants to accept the limits of their own understanding before they can proceed towards true understanding. Even if they do not arrive at the truth, they are closer than they were before. Socrates' concern for keeping truth at the discretion of dialectic discussion makes him, ironically, more democratic than his contemporaries. The sophists, or the educators of Athens' most privileged youth at the time, were versed in eristic debate tactics. They were great rhetoricians, who were foolhardily caught in Socrates' elenchus when he would press them to give more exact accounts of what they knew. Socrates gained notoriety in Athens for bringing public shame to the sophists, and he was ultimately disposed of at the hands of his disgruntled interlocutors. The charge for his death—corrupting the youth.

It is unsurprising that Plato's confidence in democracy was rather dismal after Socrates' death. What was veiled as a democracy in Athens was instead, for Plato, a tyranny of an ignorant majority. Likely disheartened by the hypocrisy of a democracy so averse to philosophy, Plato outlined an alternative system of rule in the *Republic*. Plato did not believe that every citizen had the disposition to be educated in such a way that they would be capable of self-rule. Instead of advocating for a system of equitable, public education to compensate for Athens' democratic shortcomings, Plato sought to move away from an egalitarian, democratic system entirely. His proposal was that members specialize in a particular vocation assigned to them according to their distinctive nature at birth. Those disposed towards wisdom would receive the proper training to become the "philosopher-kings," who would ultimately maintain power. Plato sought to keep power out of the hands of the unphilosophical majority through this hierarchal division.

Whereas Plato was wary of too much democracy, Jefferson was a democratic-purist, who believed that rule by the people, regardless of whether it resembles a mob, is the fulfillment of

democracy. For Jefferson, self-rule was the surest protection from the tyranny that inevitably arose from centralized power. Whereas Plato was an elitist, who believed that a wise philosopher-king would exercise appropriate rule, Jefferson was a populist, whose faith was in the people—"the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army" (Letter to Carrington, as cited in Hardt, Jefferson and Democracy, 2007). It is important to juxtapose the two thinkers, because while both were working within experimental stages of democracy, they formed distinct political ideologies that stand in polarity to each other. The one would have feared the other's proposed system of rule.

Plato lived through a historically primitive epoch in which mankind was far too savage to be egalitarian. It would take more than two millennia before enlightenment thinking could cultivate the opinions and institutions sufficient for democracy. This deep difference in their historical contexts provides an explanation for why Plato diverged from democracy in designing his ideal state, while Jefferson sought to move towards it. Yet Jefferson's theory cannot be reduced to a comparison and contrast of Plato's, and neither can it be understood explicitly by Jefferson's enlightenment influences. The political thought of Thomas Jefferson is entangled in a rather shocking paradox in which he saw little separation between revolution and democracy.

The government structure that Jefferson proposed was constituted by the direct and active participation of citizens. Jefferson used the term republic in his writings, but the way in which he conceptualized the term was closer in character to a direct democracy, where self-rule is not diluted through representation. He wrote, "Were I to assign to this term [republic] a precise and definite idea, I would say, purely and simply, it means a government by its citizens in mass, acting directly and personally, according to rules established by the majority" (Letters of Thomas Jefferson, as cited in Hardt, Jefferson and Democracy, 2007). Jefferson did, in a sense, maintain

a classic understanding of republic, from the root *res publica*, meaning "matters of public concern," for he posited that self-rule is very much a public, collective operation, rather than an individual, private one. He was skeptical of institutionalized authority, but he evades being called an anarchist because he proposed that authority is maintained by the multitude, perhaps not by elite representatives, but by the people. It is an idealized view of democracy (and generous view of human nature) to suggest that a multitude will assemble to form a government structure. But Jefferson was not so much concerned about structure, or order, as he was the *principle* of popular rule. Jefferson was not wary, as Plato was, of the people behaving as tyrants. Why did Jefferson hold popular-rule so sacred, when it was proven to be a precarious system?

Relative to his contemporaries, Jefferson developed the most radically direct conception of democracy. Jefferson placed an enormous degree of trust in popular-rule, believing that "the people themselves are its only safe depositories" (Notes on Virginia), which is reflected in the way that he celebrated Shay's Rebellion, while John Adams and others vehemently condemned the violent uprising against the government. In a system where authority is derived from the people, Jefferson did not view rebellion as subversive. Rather, he thought that rebellion enforced fluidity between the rulers and ruled to affirm the authority vested in the people. "Rebellion and political violence are necessary periodically not only as reminders that government is secondary and derives its power only from the multitude but also to change the government to bring it in line with the current desires and composition of the multitude" (Hardt, Jefferson and Democracy, 2007). The distinction made here is between the *principle* and the *practice* of rebellion. The *principle* of rebellion is to maintain that government is subordinate to the people. The *practice* of rebellion offers something even more critical to democracy: education and transformation.

Michael Hardt is a modern literary theorist whose analyses of Jefferson capture the deep dimensions of his political thought. Hardt explains that, for Jefferson, "Democracy is the goal of the revolutionary process and, paradoxically, democracy is also the means of achieving it" (Rebellion, 2007). This interchange between the ends and means of democracy points to Jefferson's view that revolution is an intrinsic feature of democracy, in light of which, Jefferson makes several suppositions about democracy. One of these suppositions is that the constituent values of democracy expire with every subsequent generation. The object of the revolutionary process is thus, to eradicate old values and to introduce new ones such that the ideals of every generation are reflected through this process. At the same time that people fulfill democracy's end, they accomplish democracy's *means*. But this idea cannot be equivocated—how does a generation reflect its ideals through the revolutionary process? And what are the implications of this?

Hardt interprets that for Jefferson, rebellion is only the first step in a two-fold process of democratic transformation that involves the eradication of old values and the introduction of new ones. While rebellion is required to reopen the revolutionary process, it does not complete it. Rebellion merely serves to eradicate the old, making it a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. To complete the transformation, rebellion must induce a calculated, collaborative process of constitutional revision. According to Hardt, "Jefferson's idea to reopen the revolutionary process is to divide each county into wards of such a size that every citizen can participate in political deliberations actively and in person" (Rebellion, 2007), this idea of which, is how Jefferson conceives of the constituent process. Given that democracy is a government of the people, its transformation entails a give and take between old values and new ones, old

generations and the present. Democracy is constantly in fluctuation between rebellion and constitution, involving everyone in this process, not just elected representatives.

Taken together, rebellion and constitution fully encapsulate the notion of "democracy by doing." There is, for Jefferson, a double effect to this revolutionary process. It transforms democracy at the same time it transforms the people. A serious challenge to Jefferson's line of thought, however, is whether or not humans can be transformed. Plato maintained the viewpoint that human nature is fixed. There are those disposed towards wisdom and those ill-disposed. It would be futile to educate those who are naturally averse to wisdom. Education, as such, should be administered only to those who have a predisposition for wisdom. The rulers will be selected from this class, as the supposition is that wisdom is a requirement for governing.

Popular-rule does not encounter the same barriers for Jefferson as it does for Plato, however, because Jefferson assumes, rather optimistically, that all people are capable of being transformed. This transformation does not need to be complete for humans to govern themselves, because democracy lends itself to a surprising transformation: through self-rule, people become capable of self-rule. Jefferson posits, contrary to Plato, that wisdom is not a requirement, but a *result* of participation. "I have no fear," Jefferson writes, "but that the result of our experiment will be that men may be trusted to govern themselves without a master" (Letter to David Hartley, as cited in Hardt, Jefferson and Democracy, 2007).

Jefferson gives overwhelming support for popular-rule in a way that his contemporaries do not. That Jefferson includes rebellion in the democratic process certainly separates him from his cohorts. But his proposal that citizens directly reproduce the Constitution appears as utopian as Plato's *Republic*. Jefferson's model is contingent upon two unreliable occurrences: 1. that rebellion will induce a period of constitutional revision, and 2. that the constituent process will

be intellectual, collaborative, and productive. This model is vulnerable to self-destruction because without the constituent process, democracy will be left in a worse condition. But I am not looking to refute Jefferson's theory on the basis of its implausibility. Rather, I want to extract the more pragmatic pieces of his thought and examine how they might work in accord with the less plausible ones. I posit that Jefferson's revolutionary theory should be understood alongside his educational aims. Jefferson's specific (and historically overlooked) contribution to American democracy was bringing to fruition a model for public education. As the founder of the University of Virginia, Jefferson established the first public university to separate church and state, which he saw as a condition for a liberal education. Public education in Jefferson's America thus emerged as an inherently democratic institution.

Critics argue that Jefferson's educational model was not democratic in the way that we understand democracy today (Carpenter). It is true that Jefferson did not establish public education on egalitarian precepts. Education was not, for Jefferson, a mechanism for social or economic mobility, as women and Blacks were generally excluded. But Jefferson's model was democratic inasmuch as it reinforced the values and practice of democracy, which was indeed his aim. Education, like rebellion, was yet another tool to prevent encroachment from an overzealous government, but where rebellion typified the activity of keeping the spirit of revolution alive, education would reinforce the intellectual, stabilizing component. Representation was the commonly accepted stabilizer for most democratic theorists but given that Jefferson was wary even of elected representatives becoming tyrants, his strongest defense was to empower the multitude with education. He was less concerned with educating to one's potential as he was educating for the common good. An educated citizenry would have the knowledge to maintain conceptions of justice among themselves and to procure a more just government.

SECTION II

PLATO AND JEFFERSON IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Given his placement in modern civilization, Jefferson is a complicated revolutionary theorist. He gives unconditional support for rebellion, saying that, "The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all" (Letter to Abigail Adams, as cited by Hardt, Jefferson and Democracy, 2007). Where I find his thought to be problematic, it equivocally accepts violent resistance as a mechanism for protest. At the same time, Jefferson channels his support for the structures and institutions that civilization has to offer, including participation in the constituent process and public education. It is troubling to reconcile the two radical ends of his theory: violent rebellion on one end and constitutional revision on the other, bloody overthrow on the one end, collaborative deliberation on the other.

In spite of these radical suggestions that Jefferson makes, the undertones of his theory have strong implications for American democracy today. Jefferson develops an interdependence between rebellion and constitution such that he rationalizes the need for both. Protest is healthy to keep the spirit of democracy alive. Constitution (which I take loosely to refer to intellectual deliberation rather than a rewrite of the constitution) is needed to complete the revolutionary process and secure a more advanced, stable democracy. Given the influx of protests in the United States and the fact that social media has fundamentally changed the nature of how we participate in the "res publica," Jefferson's theory deserves closer examination. His intuitions about democracy in the 18th century may be used as a framework for navigating the precarious conditions of our democracy in the 21st century.

Whereas many believe that the work of the American revolution culminated in the passing of the Constitution, Jefferson believed that the work of the revolution would never be complete. On this end, he is echoed by modern progressives who give unqualified support for protest in a prolonged effort to procure egalitarian principles promised by our Constitution. The past year in the United States has been marked by controversy surrounding protests of the American flag, gun control debates, and race riots. Without diminishing the value of protest, it is ever more important to look at alternatives to violent resistance, and to make use of our democratic forms that allow us to address protest through civilized means. I challenge the former part of Jefferson's theory on its equivocal acceptance of violence, but I adopt the latter portion of his theory to facilitate a means for deliberating over protest and effectively entering into the constituent process.

Jefferson had the pragmatic sense to know that his revolutionary theory should be moderated through republican channels of participation. His idea was that through these channels, which included the constituent process and education, the multitude can invent better forms to partake in and make improvements upon prevailing ideologies. I suggest that the internet should be understood in light of Jefferson's republicanism, specifically, in terms of how we might make better use of the internet's capabilities. The juxtaposition between Jefferson and Plato is relevant here, for while Jefferson would likely encourage the use of the internet as a republican form of participation, Plato would warn us of its vulnerabilities. Should we be concerned, for example, that social media is rooted in mob-mentality, as Plato likely would? Or, should we be encouraged by the increase in participation through these channels, as Jefferson might? These questions manifest as quandaries about our intellectual responsibilities in an

increasingly digital world. The question is not how we act in a physical landscape, but rather, how we *think, respond, and engage*.

The internet operates on an inherently egalitarian precept—people communicate in a shared space and access the same resources. Whereas youth, for example, have traditionally been disenfranchised from democracy by virtue of the voting age, the internet is enlisting them to participate in new, more direct ways. A scroll through Twitter will reveal that youth are consuming media and recirculating news at a relatively high rate. The strongest vocals behind the prominent progressive movements, including Black Lives Matter and gun control, are emanating from within the youth population via Twitter. It is not a new phenomenon that the younger generation is wrapped in protest, but the fact that protest now takes on a virtual platform means that protest is more pervasive in peoples' lives—and more perilous. As the medium for people, especially young people, to participate in democracy expands through the internet, we should question our aptitude for participating through these forums. Observing online interactions would reveal that we are less inclined to engage in civil, intellectual dialogue than we would hope for as citizens of a democracy.

Envision a setting from Plato's *Republic*: Socrates is questioning Thrasymachus in the public square about the meaning of justice. Thrasymachus becomes defensive about his own notion of justice and lashes out at Socrates. Now, envision a Facebook setting in which a thread of replies to a politically-charged status turns into a conglomerate of attacks and an echo chamber of "likes" on comments. Both of these scenarios suggest that open forums for discussion are fruitless when those who engage only seek to be reaffirmed in their views. The vulnerabilities of the masses sharing their voices are as real today as they were for Plato. Plato knew that being intellectually virtuous was requisite for democratic discussion, yet there is no

guarantee that the common people, when given a voice, will be inclined towards wisdom, humility, or curiosity. Adopting Plato's view, I point to a general neglect of the intellectual virtues to explain why intellectual discussion over the internet is still an anomaly.

Imagine another scene from one of Plato's dialogues, the *Apology of Socrates,* in which Socrates is at his death sentencing. The jurors (the men of Athens) have unjustly given him a death sentence for impiety and corruption. Socrates has the opportunity to concede to these charges, but to preserve his own integrity and the noble calling of philosopher, he accepts the death penalty. Now imagine a more recent instance in which the internet virtually transformed into a court of justice. In November, the Washington Post broke a story with the accounts of four women claiming sexual misconduct against Roy Moore, a Republican candidate for Senate in Alabama. The story was recirculated and widely discussed on social media. Moore lost the election in what was an unprecedented defeat for Republicans in the state of Alabama. Both of these stories portray the power of the masses to assemble into a court of justice. This image of the public as the administrator of justice is very much what Jefferson proposed in his own theory, but Socrates fell victim to a democracy that had its own, arbitrary conception of justice. This concern was surely within Jefferson's conscience, for he posited that *education* should be devised to shape the public's conception of justice.

The catchphrase, "democracy is a reflection of its people," has resounding implications in our modern context. Jefferson's idea that we reinvent the forms through which we practice democracy echoes this catchphrase. The upshot of Jefferson's republican forms of participation is that the public is responsible for their results. If we are dissatisfied, the task is not to set ablaze existing institutions, but to make better use of the ones we have. So, before we accuse elected representatives of failing us, we should look at our prevailing ideologies and systems that

brought them to power. Before we use the internet as our own soundboard, we should make better use of it as a democratic tool for information and communication. Finally, we should turn to the institution that offers the strongest foundation for our democracy, the public education system, and take practical measure towards reinventing it to meet the needs of our democracy.

It would be prudent to begin by expanding our concept of civic responsibility to include the intellectual virtues. The classical understanding of civic responsibility in the form of direct activity (voting, campaigning) is no longer sufficient as public life moves into the digital realm. Our intellectual activity is equally, if not more important, than our physical activity. But how do we foster the intellectual virtues such that they become the norm? From where, or from whom, will this new conception of intellectual responsibility arise? Intellectual virtues cannot be taught or given, but rather, cultivated from within an individual. I propose that the way to foster intellectual virtues is to foster the activity that sustains them, namely, philosophy, in American K-12 education.

SECTION III

IMPLICATIONS OF PRE-COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY

The idea of students doing philosophy can hardly be understood without seeing it in practice, but picture this: A classroom is filled with high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds. They are not on a track towards college, and they sit in cooking class. A woman walks into their classroom and tells them she is going to do philosophy with them. They are quiet. She shows them a movie clip from the Dark Knight Rises, titled "the Joker's Social Experiment." The clip presents a philosophical dilemma that opens questions on trust and self-interest. The conversation turns to police brutality, the students grow hostile, and start to yell at each other. At one point, a student interjects, "what is the point of doing this if we're just going to argue?" They all turn towards me.

This was my experience. For a moment, I was sitting in the position of Socrates, acutely aware of the disdain with which he was met in those instances with is interlocutors. This was my first encounter, however, that I had experienced backlash. I had been facilitating philosophy discussions for the better part of a semester in elementary school classrooms, and these experiences only had been positive. The middle schoolers I visited every month noted that the topics we covered were relevant to their lives but were considered taboo at school. "Hey, this relates to people!" one seventh grader exclaimed when I led a visual demonstration with two spaceships cutout from different colored poster board. The simulation is called the Ship of Theseus: A ship launches into space. During the mission, one by one, its parts are destroyed and must be replaced. Once the ship has landed, all of its parts have been replaced (it now appears a different colored ship to the students). Is it the same ship? The student properly recognized that

this was a lesson on personal identity—what is it that makes us who we are, and what constitutes a change in our identity?

Other middle schoolers had at different times commented that "they didn't think they could open up to their classmates like this…and hearing someone else's perspective helped them form their own." After the discussion I held in the high school classroom, a student came to me and shared a similar sentiment that his classmates were uncomfortable because they were not used to talking outside of their friend groups. These circumstances reflected in the classroom are merely a microcosm of our own democracy—that people self-segregate and only associate with people who think similarly or come from similar backgrounds. In the case that we do encounter someone who has a distinct set of beliefs and experiences, we are ill-prepared to navigate these differences. When I was compelled to explain to the student in the high school classroom why we were doing philosophy, I realized that there was a deeper context I needed to provide for the students. It is the nature of democracy, I said, that people disagree, but the significance is in *how* we disagree and whether or not we are able to see someone else's perspective. The students seemed appeased.

In the same way that Jefferson's revolutionary process accomplishes "democracy by doing," philosophy accomplishes "education by doing" through a shared, immersive experience. The commonality between philosophy and democracy is that both are accomplished through the dialectic process, where two transformations are happening at once: the transformation of the whole community and the individual transformations of the people who partake. In effect, participating in philosophy also provides training in the democratic process, which alone should procure a place for philosophy in education. If youth are to engage in sustained dialogue outside the classroom, especially in the online realm, then productive dialogue must be modeled *inside*

the classroom. Yet the efficacy of philosophy, like democracy, is dependent upon a community being formed. The hope is that as students engage in philosophical discussion, a community of inquiry is being cultivated to include students paying attention to the differing perspectives of their classmates, seeking understanding, and building on each other's reasoning (Mohr Lone and Burroughs, 2016, p. 55). Yet this was not the case in the instance that I visited the high school classroom. Where I was mistaken, I introduced a provocative topic on the assumption that the boundaries of a community of inquiry had already been established or could be created. In retrospect, I should have established the foundations for philosophical inquiry through an exercise in Plato's cave allegory, which illustrates the virtue of philosophy.

When the students in the high school classroom left, their teacher who observed the discussion told me that her students notoriously use violence instead of words to resolve disputes. Her personal anecdote was a surprising one, "we have an entire generation of angry teenagers." My supposition is that she was speaking specifically to the students in her own classroom, who are primarily minorities from low-income households and have been subject to the discrimination of the education system and to violence in their communities. The subjects of popular protests are at the center of these students' lives, but the education system does not involve them in dialogue over the matters closest to them. It is characteristically undemocratic that our education system does not educate the most vulnerable youth in a way that meets their needs—one that enables them to better represent themselves in democracy. That many of these students are pursuing vocational paths is not to deny them an education rich in intellectual activity. It is to say that they, of all students, need it the most.

In a similar instance in which I covered a controversial topic with a group of 8th graders, the conversation went differently. We began with a discussion on implicit and explicit bias,

which fed into a discussion on the merits and drawbacks of affirmative action policy. Where the conversation could have been deeply political, the students were able to sustain an entirely apolitical, philosophical discussion. The distinction I draw between this discussion and the one with the high schoolers is that this was not these students' first introduction to philosophy. I had introduced them to philosophy when they were in the 7th grade, and through routine lessons, they had become habituated to philosophical inquiry and community-based dialogue. This observation supports my hypothesis that philosophy should be introduced to children earlier rather than later in their education. The content of lessons with younger children is not meant to have far-reaching societal implications as it does with teenagers. The intent is simply, for children to begin modeling democratic discussion by exploring basic themes in children's literature and philosophy. By providing sustained philosophical dialogue in kindergarten through twelfth grade, the aim is that children will cultivate the appropriate intellectual dispositions and habits for their context in an increasingly connected, digital world.

It is a radical leap to suggest that philosophy, perceived to be a privileged college degree, finds its strongest application among children. As it stands, philosophy *is* a privilege. Its study is, for the most part, available only to those who attend college. For the select few philosophy majors, it is unlikely that their degree will procure many immediate job opportunities after college, if not one that will support the cost of living. Most philosophy majors pursue philosophy with the intention of continuing onto graduate, PhD, or professional programs. But this is not to say that philosophy, as a discipline is inaccessible. Philosophy has been made inaccessible by virtue of being excluded from K-12 education.

Doing philosophy with youth is not a matter of teaching them the theories of Aristotle, Kant, Rousseau, Locke, and Mill. Certainly, this is a possibility if philosophy has a future in K-

12 education. For fear of youth being disenchanted by education, the goal is to ignite a spirit for questioning and dialogue in them, as to recruit them as active participants in, rather than recipients of, their education. In a system where education is delivered such that students are taught to regurgitate material for standardized tests, eliciting questions and dialogue from students is too precarious to be acceptable. My misgiving about the American education system is that its achievement standards do not reflect what education is doing in the students' lives. A real challenge of integrating philosophy into K-12 education is to provide a quantitative measurement of its effects, but I would argue that the most profound evidence of philosophy's effects is anecdotal, which is what I have intended to provide here.

CONCLUSION

There is a rather serendipitous news headline at the time that I write this paper: Marco Rubio has revised his view on philosophy. Rubio said in a tweet recently, "I made fun of philosophy 3 years ago but then I was challenged to study it so I started reading the stoics. I've changed my views on philosophy…We need both [welders and philosophers]!" Rubio has done something unconventional for a politician, but distinctly characteristic of a philosopher—he has traded in his views for better ones. Rubio has successfully undergone Socrates' *elenchus* and proceeded with more well-formed beliefs. This event is echoed by a strongly Jeffersonian sentiment—when left to her natural weapons, truth will prevail. Perhaps Rubio has shown us that philosophy is a natural weapon for the truth. Rubio's claim to be corrected on the very discipline that offers training in self-correction is an ironic revelation of philosophy's transformative effects in our lives.

Yet if philosophy is to be given a place in K-12 education, it requires a larger movement than a single (although prominent) politician revising his opinion of philosophy. Philosophy is still gravely misunderstood and underrated for its potential to transform hearts and minds through exposure to differing perspectives. Philosophy in K-12 classrooms has strong implications for democracy precisely because both philosophy and democracy are constituted by individuals with unique experiences and perspectives. To involve children in the practice philosophy is to teach them not to isolate minority viewpoints or to assert their position, but to embrace all viewpoints as to mold and strengthen their own. In effect, philosophy captures the essence of American democracy—that the strength of the whole consists in the freedom and expressions of the individuals. Our United States motto, *E plurabis unum,* "out of many, one," is

not to say that out of many units, a single one emerges, but that a single unit is present among individual ones. Philosophy is perhaps the best working representation of this ideal, as the aim of philosophy is not for its participants to reach a single determination of truth, but for a common point of view to arise from individual perspectives.

I use Jefferson to represent the implications of pre-college philosophy for democracy, because he conceives of a democracy that, like philosophy, involves individuals in its transformation and, consequently, transforms the individuals themselves. His theory encapsulates the interplay between both the collective and individual aims of democracy. On one end, Jefferson's republican conception of participation enables us to see ourselves in light of the whole. On the other end, his direct conception of democracy allows us the freedom and autonomy to protect ourselves from encroachment. In effect, the revolutionary and constituent processes that he conceptualizes provide citizens an exercise in personal autonomy at the same time that citizens work towards a unified conception of justice.

The genius of Jefferson's thought is that he did not design democracy for the 18th century. He designed democracy for every consecutive century. The suggestion of his progressivism is that the democratic institutions themselves require constant reevaluation for the matters of the public to be reflected in them. Jefferson mirrors the sentiments of Socrates in calling for self-examination, yet Jefferson's is the self-examination of the collective whole. If Jefferson were to witness the current state of our democracy, he would likely suggest that we undergo a thorough self-examination to bring our values, practices, and institutions into alignment.

As it stands, American democracy is disjointed. There are waves of people fighting for racial justice, but there is no unified effort to resolve these injustices. It is as if we have entered

into Jefferson's two-fold revolutionary process by involving ourselves in rebellion with no promise of the constituent process to follow. Our education system neglects the role of educating for what we have in common and creates more disparity between socioeconomic classes. Our challenge is that the institution with the most potential to facilitate the self-examination needed to resolve these conflicts, the public education system, is in need of its own reform. For public education to be compatible with 21st century democracy, it requires an adjustment in the way that education is delivered. It is a provocative suggestion to say that philosophy should be integrated into K-12 education, but the environment for youth outside of the classroom is far more precarious. With the increasing involvement of youth in protest and the wide information and communication mechanisms provided by the internet, the strength of our democracy depends upon the education system preparing youth for these conditions. Without philosophy in K-12 education to cultivate the appropriate intellectual virtues and activities, then we fail to live up to Jefferson's ideal and we join Plato in showing why democracy fails.

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